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CORRESPONDENCE.

Captive Wild Birds.

TO THE EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

Dear Sirs:—I have read with great pleasure in your January issue, Mr. Owen's interesting paper on a captive Hermit Thrush, but there is one point in connection with his treatment of the bird—his liberating him—on which I should like to say a few words, particularly as it is almost universally supposed that to give a caged bird freedom, is a kind thing to do, and the happiest for the bird. He had taken the young Hermit before his training for a free life was finished, and accustomed him to having his wants supplied and his safety assured, without effort of his own. Then, when the season was nearly over, he thrust the young creature out into the world to forage for himself. The bird had not learned to seek his own food, nor, probably, to care for his own safety, and his natural ties were completely severed, so that he had no instructor. This is frequently done, and of course from the kindest motives, but it has always seemed to me a great mistake, and a cruelty to the young bird, to deprive him at one stroke of home, protection, shelter and food.

According to my experience, when birds are thoroughly well treated, not too closely confined to cages, and made happy under human care, they learn to appreciate it, and many of them prefer to remain where life is made easy for them. This is often the case, even with old birds who know the pleasures as well as the pains of freedom. When let out, of course they fly, but if they do not get lost they frequently return to their old quarters. Many cases of this kind have been reported, and I have had birds so attached to the comforts of their home that they even refused to leave the cage though the door was open all day long, and birds were free all around them.

Birds are naturally fond of their liberty, no doubt, and if I had the power to prevent it, not one should ever be caged, but after having interfered with their parental training, taken them from their natural life, and accustomed them to human care, to set them free seems to me to doom them to great hardships, if not to death.

OLIVE THORNE MILLER.

A Desirable Substitute for Carbon Disulphide as an Insecticide.

TO THE EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

Dear Sirs:—The want of an efficient substitute for disulphide of carbon, one which should be free from the disgusting odor and extreme danger of this chemical, has long been felt by all having ornithological collections; and it seem not unlikely that the comparatively new preparation of formic aldehyde, known as 'formalin,' will fill this want.